

Message Text

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E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, IN

SUBJECT: POLITICAL AND CASTE PRESSURES IN TAMIL NADU

SUMMARY: ONE OF THE CENTRAL ASPECTS OF POLITICS IN TAMIL NADU HAS BEEN THE ANTIPATHY BETWEEN THE SMALL BRAHMIN ELITE (3 PERCENT OF THE POPULATION) WHO TRADITIONALLY DOMINATED THE STATE AND THE REMAINING NON-BRAHMIN 97 PERCENT. BRAHMIN ONCE OCCUPIED MOST OF THE BEST JOBS IN THE POLICE AND ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES. THE CHARGE OF "BRAHMIN DOMINATION" WAS ONE OF THE ISSUES ON WHICH THE DMK ROSE TO POWER IN 1967 (THE OTHERS BEING "DOMINATION FROM THE NORTH" AND FORCED IMPOSITION OF HINDI). EVEN BEFORE DMK RULE IN 1967, HOWEVER, CONGRESS GOVERNMENTS UNDER CHIEF MINISTER KAMARAJ HAD BEGUN TO REDRESS THE IMBALANCE IN STATE SERVICES BY APPOINTING NON-BRAHMIN TO SENIOR POSITIONS. THE DMK, OF COURSE, ACCELERATED THIS PROCESS. SINCE THE IMPOSITION OF PRESIDENT'S RULE IN TAMIL NADU, WE HAVE BEEN HEARING REPORTS IN DELHI THAT AIDED AND ABETTED BY THE CENTRE BRAHMIN ARE AGAIN COMING TO DOMINATE THE GOTN. CONGEN MADRAS BELIEVES THERE HAS BEEN SOME REVIVAL OF BRAHMIN INFLUENCE BUT NOT AS MUCH AS MAY BE RUMORED IN THE CAPITAL. END SUMMARY.

1. IN A JULY 2 CONVERSATION, GODEY MURAHARI, VICE CHAIRMAN

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OF THE RAJYA SABHA, TOLD POLCOUNSELOR THAT HE HAD MADE

SEVERAL TRIPS TO TAMIL NADU IN LAST FEW MONTHS AND HAD REPORTED HIS OBSERVATIONS TO CONGRESS PRESIDENT BAROOAH AND HOME MINISTER OF STATE OM MEHTA. HE SAID HE HAD WARNED BAROOAH AND MEHTA ABOUT THE INCREASINGLY "BRAHMIN FLAVOR" TO THE GOTN UNDER PRESIDENT'S RULE AND THEY HAD AGREED IT HAD BEEN AN ERROR TO SEND TWO BRAHMIN ADVISORS. MURAHARI CLAIMED THAT AS A RESULT OF TRANSFERS AND RESHUFFLING OF IAS PERSONNEL IN RECENT MONTHS, TWELVE OUT OF THE FOURTEEN SECRETARIES TO THE GOVERNMENT AND 80 PERCENT OF THE DISTRICT COLLECTORS WERE NOW BRAHMIN. ALTHOUGH HE DOUBTED THAT DAVE WAS INTENTIONALLY FAVORING BRAHMIN IN THE FILLING OF SENIOR POSITIONS, HE THOUGHT THAT THIS JUST HAPPENED NATURALLY WHENEVER BRAHMIN WERE IN KEY POSITIONS AND THAT SUBRAMANIAM WAS CONSCIOUSLY WORKING IN THIS DIRECTION. ACCORDING TO MURAHARI, SUKHADIA HAD BEEN POSTED TO TAMIL NADU AS GOVERNOR IN ORDER TO GIVE A NON-BRAHMIN "TILT" TO THE ADMINISTRATION, BUT THIS WAS NOT ENOUGH. MURAHARI SAID THAT HE HAD TOLD BAROOAH AND MEHTA THAT EVEN THE LOCAL CONGRESS (R) LEADERS WERE DISGRUNTLED WITH THE APPARENT RISE TO POWER OF BRAHMIN ADMINISTRATORS AND WARNED THAT THE RESULT WOULD BE DAMAGING BOTH TO THE GOI IMAGE AND TO CONGRESS' POLITICAL PROSPECTS IN THE STATE - SINCE CONGRESS FORTUNES WERE BOUND TO RISE AND FALL ON THE BASIS OF THE GENERAL IMAGE OF CENTRAL RULE.

2.SWE ASKED CONGEN MADRAS ABOUT MURAHARI'S REMARKS AND RECEIVED THE FOLLOWING COMMENTS:

(A) NUMBERS: MADRAS FEELS THAT MURAHARI HAS EXAGGERATED HIS FIGURES. OF THE TWENTY-TWO MEMBERS OF THE GOTN SECRETARIAT (I.E., HEADS OF STATE GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS), CONGEN BELIEVES THAT ONLY EIGHT TO TEN ARE BRAHMIN. OF FOURTEEN DISTRICT COLLECTORS, ONLY FOUR OR FIVE ARE BRAHMIN. ACCORDING TO THE CONGEN'S FIGURES, OF THE 203 IAS OFFICERS ALLOTTED TO THE STATE, A DISPROPORTIONATE NUMBER ARE NON-BRAHMIN.

(B) THE RETURN OF THE BRAHMIN ADMINISTRATIVE ELITE: CONGEN MADRAS CONCEDES SOME TRUTH IN THE CHARGE THAT SOME BRAHMIN HAVE BEEN PLACED IN KEY POSITIONS AND THAT A DIS-CONFIDENTIAL

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PROPORTIONATE NUMBER HAVE RECEIVED THE MORE DESIRABLE JOBS. HOWEVER, ITS SOURCES BELIEVE THAT THIS IS MERELY A RE-BALANCING OF THE SCALES, UNTILTING THE TILT AGAINST THE BRAHMIN WHICH EXISTED SO OPENLY IN THE KAMARAJ AND ESPECIALLY IN THE DMK YEARS. THE CONGEN ALSO POINTS OUT THAT THE CENTRE HAS PLACED NON-BRAHMIN IN SEVERAL KEY POSITIONS: CHIEF SECRETARY KARTHIKEYAN IS A NON-BRAHMIN OF VERY HUMBLE ORIGINS; INSPECTOR GENERAL OF POLICE STRACEY

IS AN ANGLO-INDIAN; THE MADRAS CITY POLICE COMMISSIONER IS A NON-BRAHMIN, AS IS THE CHIEF JUSTICE OF THE HIGH COURT.

(C) FAVORITISM BY DAVE AND SUBRAMANIAM: MADRAS HAS ALSO HEARD CRITICISM THAT SUBRAMANIAM TRANSFERS BRAHMINS INTO KEY SLOTS WHENEVER HE CAN, BUT ADDS THAT NON-BRAHMINS IN THE STATE EXPECT SUCH FAVORITISM FROM A SOUTH INDIAN BRAHMIN WHO WAS RAISED IN THE CLIMATE OF BRAHMIN/ANTI-BRAHMIN ANTIPATHY. ON THE OTHER HAND, DAVE IS CONSIDERED TO BE A "NORTH INDIAN BRAHMIN" AND THUS IS NOT OPEN TO CHARGES OF FAVORITISM. ACCORDING TO THE CONGEN, DAVE IS MUCH MORE POPULAR THAN SUBRAMANIAM AND IS WIDELY RESPECTED IN TAMIL CIRCLES AS A MAN OF IMPECCABLE CREDENTIALS WHO WOULD PUT COMPETENCY ABOVE CASTE IN DETERMINING WHO GETS WHAT JOB.

(D) GOVERNOR SUKHADIA'S APPOINTMENT: MADRAS BELIEVES THAT THERE WAS MORE TO SUKHADIA'S APPOINTMENT THAN JUST THE CENTRE'S DESIRE TO ADD A NON-BRAHMIN FLAVOR TO THE ADMINISTRATION, ASIDE FROM THE FACT THAT HIS PREDECESSOR, K. K. SHAH, WAS ALSO A NON-BRAHMIN. THE IMPRESSION AMONG INFORMED CIRCLES IN MADRAS IS THAT SUKHADIA WAS SENT BECAUSE (1) HE IS A LONG-TIME CONGRESS PARTY REGULAR; (W) HE HAS HAD LONG ADMINISTRATIVE EXPERIENCE AS A CHIEF MINISTER; AND (3) HE IS AN ACTIVIST AND CAN FILL SOME OF THE POLITICAL VACUUM CREATED BY THE FACT THAT THE GOTN IS A GOVERNMENT WITHOUT POLITICIANS.

(E) CONGRESS (R) DISGRUNTLEMENT: THE CONGEN HAS NOT YET HEARD OF ANY DISSATISFACTION WITHIN THE TNPCC OVER ALLEGED BRAHMIN DOMINATION OF THE ADMINISTRATION.

(F) GENERAL CRITICISM: THE CRITICAL REMARKS THAT
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CONGEN MADRAS HAS HEARD ABOUT TAMIL NADU UNDER PRESIDENT'S RULE ARE NOT RELATED TO A RETURN OF BRAHMIN ADMINISTRATORS, BUT RATHER TO THE FACT THAT TWO CIVIL SERVANTS CANNOT RUN A GOVERNMENT, EVEN WHEN THEY ARE AS CAPABLE AS DAVE AND SUBRAMANIAM. SUKHADIA WILL UNDOUBTEDLY FILL SOME OF THE POLITICAL VOID, BUT HE CANNOT DO IT ALL. THE CONGEN BELIEVES THAT PRESIDENT'S RULE IS BEGINNING TO BE UNPOPULAR NOT BECAUSE IT IS "BRAHMIN RULE", BUT BECAUSE PEOPLE ARE BEGINNING TO THINK OF IT AS "CENTER RULE", "CONGRESS RULE", OR PERHAPS MOST ACCURATELY "BUREAUCRATIC RULE".

3. CONGEN MADRAS POINTS OUT THAT THE CENTRE WILL WANT TO DO EVERYTHING IT CAN TO KEEP THE ANTI-BRAHMIN ISSUE ON ICE. THE DMK IS SEVERELY CIRCUMSCRIBED IN ITS POLITICAL ACTIVITIES AND IS INCREASINGLY UNABLE TO USE THIS ISSUE TO PLAY UPON

TAMIL EMOTIONS. NO OTHER PARTY OR ORGANIZATION IS LIKELY TO PUSH IT. ANTI-BRAHMINISM MAY REMAIN AN ISSUE BELOW THE SURFACE, BUT WITHOUT A POLITICAL PARTY TO KEEP THE ISSUE CONSTANTLY AT THE FOREFRONT OF PUBLIC ATTENTION, IT IS LIKELY TO REMAIN THERE. IN THIS REGARD, THE WEAKER THE DMK BECOMES, THE LESS LIKELY ARE THE CHANCES OF REVISING THIS EMOTIONAL ISSUE. EMBASSY DELHI DOES NOT TAKE ISSUE WITH THIS CONCLUSION IN THE ABSENCE OF ANY STRONGER EVIDENCE THAN MURAHARI'S COMMENTS, BUT WE AND MADRAS WILL CONTINUE TO KEEP AN EYE ON THIS POTENTIALLY EXPLOSIVE ISSUE.
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